



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

**Animal and  
Plant Health  
Inspection  
Service**

FY 2002



## WILDLIFE SERVICES—WISCONSIN

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### USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Wisconsin

Every day, citizens, industries, organizations, and State and Federal agencies call on Wisconsin Wildlife Services (WS) for expertise in protecting crops, livestock, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

The WS program in Wisconsin manages a wide variety of wildlife-related programs that affect a large number of citizens. For example, WS specialists provide assistance to farmers who are experiencing wildlife damage to their crops while helping the public find ways to resolve nuisance wildlife problems. WS also captures and relocates large numbers of problem black bears, and resolves conflicts caused by deer, wolves, beaver, and Canada geese. In addition, WS protects air travelers from wildlife hazards at numerous airports throughout the State.

### Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this *tech-*

#### Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting passengers and aircraft from collisions with wildlife
- Protecting natural resources such as timber, forest resources, trout stream habitat, and wolf recovery
- Protecting crops and livestock from wildlife damage, including wolf depredation
- Resolving nuisance wildlife problems for all Wisconsin citizens
- Assisting the State with all aspects of managing CWD in both wild and captive cervids

#### Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Wisconsin:

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Improving assessment, sampling, and economic methods for wildlife damage management
- Reducing goose damage through avian infertility
- All aspects of research to manage CWD including: transmissibility, live animal tests, methods to detect the presence and persistence of the CWD agent in the environment, human dimensions of CWD, and methods research on how best to depopulate diseased herds
- Improving lethal and nonlethal methodologies to assist livestock producers and pet owners in alleviating wolf depredation conflicts



*nical assistance* can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance*, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

While WS conducts a wide range of operational and research activities throughout the United States, a few examples are provided to highlight WS' role in protecting agricultural crops, public health and safety, and natural resources in Wisconsin.

**Protecting Wisconsin's Agricultural Resources**—On Feb. 28, 2002, chronic wasting disease (CWD), a fatal illness affecting deer and elk, was detected in the Mount Horeb area of Wisconsin. Since the disease was first identified, WS has been working with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to help contain the spread of the disease and to reduce the wild deer population within the infected area. WS has been instrumental in helping landowners obtain collection permits to hunt deer on their property. WS has also helped to remove deer on private lands and depopulate infected captive herds. When hunters and landowners bring deer to collection sites for testing, WS helps to collect the necessary samples. This work is especially important because the State's deer population has been increasing in recent years and is currently estimated at 1,650,000 animals.

In addition to disease concerns, this large deer population has resulted in a heightened level of crop damage. Under agreements with 56 counties and the DNR, WS has investigated and verified more than \$2 million in wildlife damage that occurred on approximately 605 farms in the last year. These activities have helped affected farmers to receive close to \$1 million in compensation from the State crop damage fund. Managing CWD in the wild white-tailed deer population in Wisconsin is

pressuring existing budgets and has also caused a decrease in landowner tolerance for deer damage and therefore increased the work load for WS.

**Providing Technical Assistance in Resolving Wildlife Related Problems**—In cooperation with the DNR, WS initiated two toll-free phone lines where the public can receive technical advice on how to resolve nuisance wildlife problems. This year, WS received and responded to 7,700 nuisance wildlife phone calls and personal contacts. These requests for advice involved a wide range of wildlife problems from bats in attics, to wolf depredation on livestock, to bears in hot tubs. As part of Wisconsin's nuisance wildlife program, WS responded to more than 1,200 black bear complaints, and captured and relocated 325 black bears in fiscal year (FY) 2002. These animals were causing damage to crops and property, or were a threat to public safety. Wisconsin WS has relocated close to 5,000 bears.

**Protecting Air Travel**—In total, WS has provided 33 Wisconsin airports with evaluations and information on how to eliminate potential wildlife strike hazards. WS biologists performed wildlife hazard evaluations at 4 Wisconsin airports in FY 2002. When requested by the airport, WS follows up an evaluation by conducting an intensive year-long wildlife hazard reduction program.

In addition to the direct work conducted in Wisconsin, WS' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) conducts research from its Sandusky, OH Field Station to reduce wildlife hazards to aviation and to reduce risks to the public. Studies are underway at several large airports where scientists evaluate habitat management practices and wildlife dispersal techniques. NWRC also maintains the National Wildlife Strike Database used by the Federal Aviation Administration and airports to monitor trends and wildlife species that pose the greatest threat to aviation.

**Protecting Wisconsin's Natural Resources**—In cooperation with the DNR and the U.S. Forest Service, WS maintains 800 miles of pristine trout streams throughout the State that were once seriously degraded by overabundant beaver populations and their dam building actions. WS manages beaver populations on these streams to eliminate the widespread flooding of forested land and to allow native trout to once again reproduce naturally.

WS is also a critical team player involved with wolf recovery in Wisconsin and the Great Lakes Region. According to guidelines set forth by the Wisconsin Wolf Technical Advisory Committee, WS is responsible for resolving wolf conflicts with livestock, pets, and bear hounds. WS' ability to alleviate wolf depredation of livestock is essential to wolf recovery because it ensures public support and public tolerance for the continued recovery of the endangered gray wolf in Wisconsin. In FY 2002, WS biologists investigated and resolved more than 70 gray wolf depredation complaints, which led to the capture and relocation of 18 depredating wolves. To date, WS has received 315 gray wolf complaints that have led to the capture and relocation of 36 depredating gray wolves.



Looking to the Future

While the continuing recovery of the endangered gray wolf in Wisconsin is considered a wildlife success story, conflicts are associated with their reintroduction. The population has grown from 34 wolves in 1990 to more than 320 adult wolves in 2002. This represents an average annual population growth of about 20 percent. Wisconsin relies on WS' expertise in helping to manage problems, such as increased predation on livestock and pets that are associated with an increasing wolf population. Currently, however, WS does not have the resources to adequately assist the public in resolving all wolf conflicts.

The Wisconsin WS program has experienced an increased demand for assistance from the public and the State on a variety of issues. Those of greatest concern include the rapidly increasing population of non-migratory, federally-protected Canada geese. The current population of resident Canada geese in Wisconsin is more than 70,000, and these birds have had a serious impact on numerous municipalities and private property owners. An urgent need exists for WS to provide assistance to these owners.

Lastly, CWD will continue to be a major issue for Wisconsin in the coming years. WS is likely to play an important role in both research and field support as the DNR works to manage the disease and reduce its impact on the State.

Wisconsin Wildlife Services Funding ●●●●●●●●●●

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives funding from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

